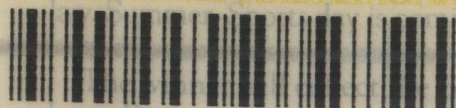


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...ave broken the
...ing up, with the big
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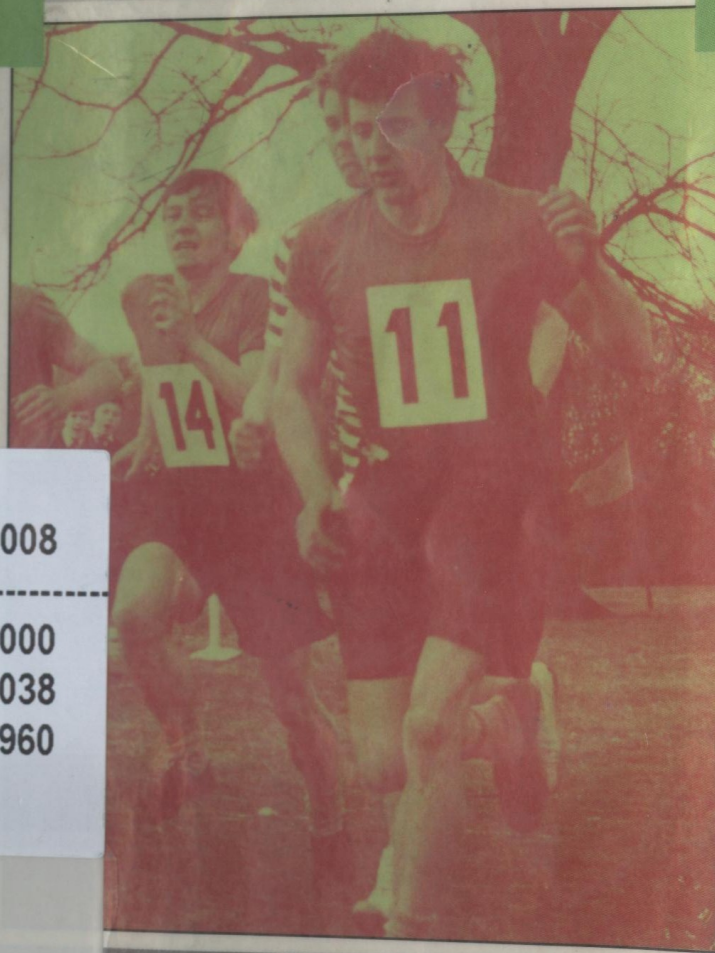
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The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner

Alan Sillitoe



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ALAN SILLITOE
THE LONELINESS
OF THE
LONG-DISTANCE
RUNNER

ALAN SILLITOE

THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER

Originally edited by

Aage Salling and Erik Hvid

Revised by Robert Dewsnap, 1991

Illustrations by Gunnar Breiding



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ALAN SILLITOE

was born in Nottingham, England in 1928. He worked in factories from the age of 14, and then for two years as an air force radio operator in Malaya. After that, he lived for some time in Mallorca (Majorca) and started to write.

After ten years' work his first book, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, was published in 1958. Since then, Alan Sillitoe has written more than 40 books: novels, stories, poems, plays, essays, travel books and children's books.

With his wife Ruth Fainlight, Alan Sillitoe now divides his time between London and Kent.

The *Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* appeared in 1959. It won the Hawthornden Prize for literature and was made into a film.

SOME BOOKS BY ALAN SILLITOE

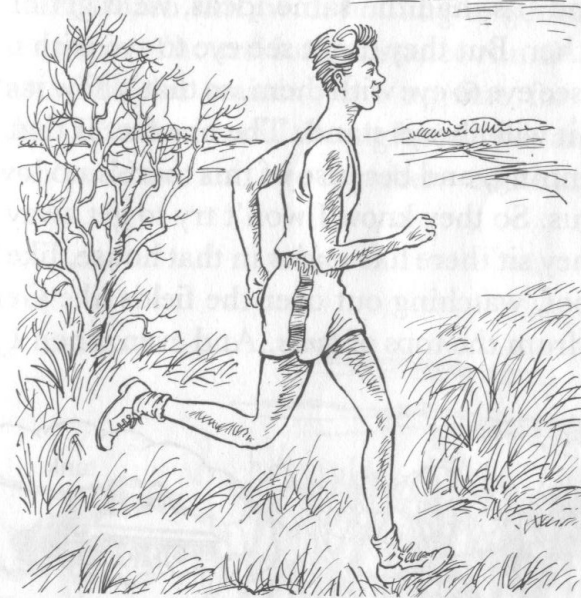
Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1958), *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (1959), *Key to the Door* (1961), *The Ragman's Daughter* (1963, stories), *The Death of William Posters* (1965), *A Tree on Fire* (1967), *Guzman Go Home* (1968), *A Start in Life* (1970), *Raw Material* (1972), *Men, Women and Children* (1973, stories), *The Flame of Life* (1974), *The Widower's Son* (1976), *The Storyteller* (1979), *The Second Chance* (1981), *Her Victory* (1982), *The Lost Flying Boat* (1983), *Down from the Hill* (1984), *Life Goes On* (1985), *Out of the Whirlpool* (1987), *The Far Side of the Street* (1988), *The Open Door* (1989).

As you read this book, you should remember that many of the words and phrases are slang, colloquialisms or dialect forms and are therefore not considered to be correct school English.



1

As soon as I got to *Borstal* they made me a long-distance *cross-country* runner. I suppose they thought I was just the build for it, because I was long and thin for my age (and still am). In any case, I didn't mind it much, to tell you the truth. That was because running had always been made much of in our family, especially running away from the police. I've always been a good runner, quick and with a big *stride* as well. There's only one trouble: no matter how fast I run, and I did run fast, it didn't stop me getting caught by the *cops* after that *bakery* job.



Borstal, type of school for boys aged 16-21 who have broken the law. (Named after an old prison in Kent.)

cross-country, across open country and not in a sportsfield

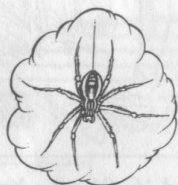
stride, step

cop, policeman

bakery job (here), breaking into a baker's shop to steal money

You might think it a bit strange, having long-distance cross-country runners in Borstal. You would think that the first thing a long-distance cross-country runner would do, when they set him loose at the fields and woods, would be to run as far away from the place as he could get. But you're wrong, and I'll tell you why. The first thing is that the people over us aren't as *daft* as they most of the time look. For another thing, I'm not so daft as I would look if I tried to *make a break for it* on my long-distance running. That's because to escape and then get caught is a fool's game, and I'm not falling for it. *Cunning* is what counts in this life; I'm telling you straight: they're cunning, and I'm cunning. If only 'them' and 'us' had the same ideas, we'd get on very well together. But they don't see eye to eye with us and we don't see eye to eye with them, so that's how it stands and how it will always stand. The one fact is that all of us are cunning, and because of this there's no love lost between us. So they know I won't try to get away from them. They sit there like *spiders* in that house, like birds on the roof, watching out over the fields like German generals from the tops of *tanks*. And even when I *jogtrot*

spider



tank



daft, stupid

make a break for it, run away

cunning, cleverness in deceiving people

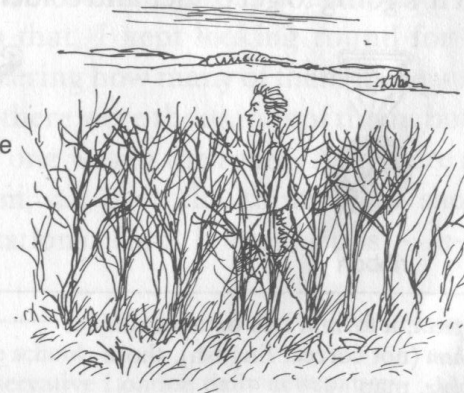
jogtrot, run fairly slowly but steadily

on behind a wood and they can't see me anymore, they know my head will show up along that *hedgetop* in an hour's time and that I'll come back to the man on the gate. Because when on a raw and frosty morning I get up at five o'clock and stand *shivering* on the stone floor, and all the rest still have another hour to sleep before the bells go, I slip downstairs through all the corridors to the big outside door, I feel like the first and last man in the world, both at once, if you can believe me. I feel like the first man because I've hardly got any clothes on and am sent against the frozen fields in *shimmy* and shorts – even the first poor man dropped on to the earth in midwinter knew how to make a suit of leaves. But there I am, frozen stiff, with nothing to get me warm except a couple of hours' long-distance running before breakfast. They're training me up fine for the big sports day. This is when all the pigfaced lords and ladies – who can't add two and two together – come and make

hedge



shimmy



shiver, shake with cold

speeches to us. They tell us about sports being just the thing to get us leading an honest life and keep our finger-ends off *them* shop locks. They give us a bit of blue ribbon and a cup for a prize after we've worn
 5 ourselves out running or jumping, like race horses.

Only, we don't get so well looked-after as race horses, that's the only thing.

So there I am, standing in the doorway in shimmy and shorts, without a breakfast in me, looking out at
 10 frosty flowers on the ground. I suppose you think this is enough to make me cry? Not likely. Just because I feel like the first *bloke* in the world wouldn't make me cry. It makes me feel fifty times better than when I'm shut up in that *dormitory* with three hundred others. No, it's
 15 sometimes when I stand there feeling like the *last* man in the world that I don't feel so good. I feel like the last man in the world because I think that all those three hundred sleepers behind me are dead. They sleep so well I think that every head has *kicked the bucket* in the
 20 night and I'm the only one left. And when I look out into the bushes and little frozen lakes I have the feeling that it's going to get colder and colder: everything I see,



ribbon



cup

speech, a formal talk on a set subject
them (not correct English), those
bloke, man
dormitory, bedroom for many people
kick the bucket, die

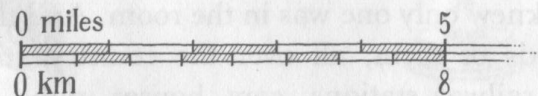
meaning my red arms as well, is going to be covered with a thousand miles of ice, all the earth, right up to the sky and over every bit of land and sea. So I try to kick this feeling out and act like I'm the first man on earth. And that makes me feel good, so as soon as I'm steamed
 5 up enough to get this feeling, I take a flying leap out of the doorway, and off I trot.

* * *

I'm in Essex. It's supposed to be a good Borstal, at least that's what the *governor* said to me when I got here from Nottingham. "We want to trust you while you are in
 10 this house," he said, smoothing out his newspaper with white workless hands. I read the name of the paper upside down: *Daily Telegraph*. "If you *play ball* with us, we'll play ball with you." (Honest to God, you'd have thought it was going to be one long tennis match.) "We
 15 want hard honest work and we want good athletics," he said as well. "And if you give us both these things, you can be sure we'll do right by you and send you back into the world an honest man." And when the governor kept saying how 'we' wanted you to do this, and 'we'
 20 wanted you to do that, I kept looking round for the other blokes, wondering how many of them there were. Of course, I knew there were thousands of them, but as far as I knew only one was in the room. And there are thousands of them, all over the country, in shops, 25 offices, railway stations, cars, houses, pubs – *In-law*

governor, head of the school
Daily Telegraph, conservative London daily newspaper
play ball, work together
In-law, who has not broken the law

blokes like you and them, all on the watch for *Out-law* blokes like me and us – and waiting to phone for the *coppers* as soon as we make a false move. And it'll always be there. I'll tell you that now, because I haven't
 5 finished making all my false moves yet, and I dare say I won't until I kick the bucket. If the In-laws are hoping to stop me making false moves they're wasting their time. They might as well stand me up against a wall and let fly with a dozen rifles. That's the only way they'll
 10 stop me, and a few million others. Because I've been doing a lot of thinking since coming here. They can spy on us all day to see if we're working *good* or doing our 'athletics' but they can't make an *X-ray* of our insides to find out what we're telling ourselves. I've
 15 been asking myself all sorts of questions, and thinking about my life up to now. And I like doing all this. It passes the time away and *don't* make Borstal seem half so bad as the boys in our street used to say it was. And this long-distance running is best of all, because it makes
 20 me think so good that I learn things even better than when I'm in my bed at night. And apart from that, and because I think so much while I'm running, I'm getting to be one of the best runners in the Borstal. I can go my *five miles* round better than anybody else I know.



Out-law, who has broken the law
copper, policeman
good (not correct English), well
X-ray, picture of the inside of the body (a Roentgen picture)
don't (not correct English), doesn't

I start by telling myself I'm the first man ever to be dropped into the world. Then I take that first flying leap out into the frosty grass of an early morning, when even birds haven't the heart to whistle. And then I get
 5 to thinking, and that's what I like. I go my rounds in a dream, turning at *lane* or footpath corners without knowing I'm turning, leaping streams without knowing they're there, and shouting good morning to the early cow-milker without seeing him. It's grand, being
 10 a long-distance runner, out in the world, by yourself. There's not a soul to make you angry or tell you what to do or that there's a shop to break and enter a bit back from the next street. Sometimes I think that I've never been so free as during that couple of hours when I'm
 15 trotting up the path out of the gates and turning by that big oak tree at the lane end. Everything's dead, but good, because it's dead before coming alive, not dead after being alive. That's how I look at it. Mind you, I often feel frozen stiff at first, I can't feel my hands or
 20 feet or flesh at all. I'm a *ghost* who wouldn't know the earth was under him if he didn't see it now and again through the mist. Some people would call this frost-pain suffering if they wrote about it to their *mams*



ghost

lane, narrow road
mam, mother

in a letter. But I don't, because I know that in half an hour I'm going to be warm. I know that by the time I get to the main road and am turning on to the footpath by the bus stop I'm going to feel as hot as a stove and as
 5 happy as a dog with a *tin* tail.

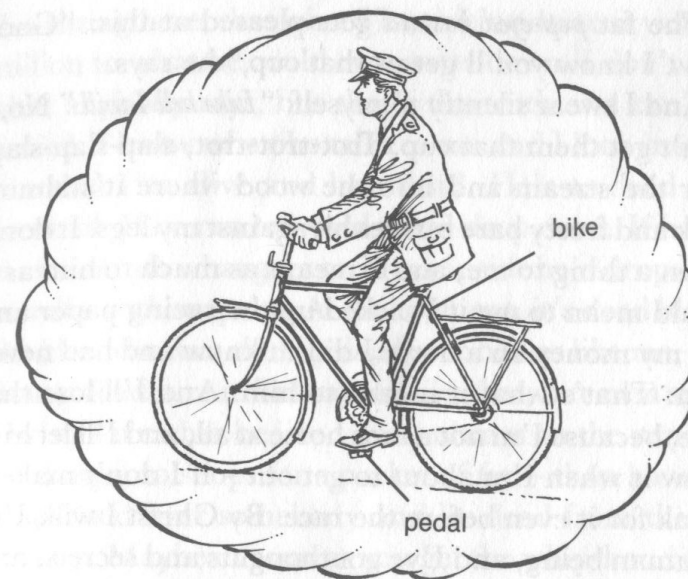
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It's a good life, I'm saying to myself, if you don't give in to coppers and Borstal-bosses and the rest of them
 10 In-laws. Trot-trot-trot. Puff-puff-puff. Slap-slap-slap go my feet on the hard soil. Swish-swish-swish as my arms and side catch the bare branches of a bush. For I'm seventeen now, and when they let me out of this – if I don't make a break and see that things turn out
 15 otherwise – they'll try to get me in the army. And what's the difference between the army and this place I'm in now? I've seen the *barracks* near where I live, and if there weren't soldiers on guard outside with rifles you wouldn't know the difference between their high walls
 20 and the place I'm in now. Even though the soldiers come out sometimes for a beer, so what? Don't I come out three mornings a week on my long-distance running, which is fifty times better than drinking. When they first said that I was to do my long-distance
 25 running without a guard *pedalling* beside me on a *bike* I couldn't believe it. They called it a modern place, but they can't fool me because I know it's just like any other Borstal, going by the stories I've heard, except that they let me trot about like this. Borstal's Borstal no matter

tin, metal

boss, governor or other head

barracks, building(s) where soldiers live



what they do. But anyway, I complained about them sending me out so early to run five miles on an empty stomach, until they talked me round to thinking it wasn't so bad – which I knew all the time – until they
 5 called me a good sport. Then they *patted* me on the back when I said I'd do it and that I'd try to win them the Borstal Cup for Long-Distance Cross-Country Running (All England). And now the governor talks to
 10 me when he comes on his rounds, almost as he'd talk to his prize race horse, if he had one.

"All right, Smith?" he asks.

"Yes, sir," I answer.

"How's the running coming along?"

"I've set myself to trot round the *grounds* after dinner
 15 every day, sir," I tell him.

pat, hit lightly in a friendly way

grounds, land belonging to the school

The fat *pop-eyed bastard* gets pleased at this: "Good show. I know you'll get us that cup," he says.

And I swear silently to myself: "*Like hell I will.*" No, I won't get them that cup. Trot-trot-trot, slap-slap-slap, 5 over the stream and into the wood where it's almost dark and frosty bare bushes hit against my legs. It don't mean a thing to me; and it means as much to him as it would mean to me if I picked up the racing paper and put my money on a horse I didn't know and had never 10 seen. That's what it means to him. And I'll lose that race, because I'm not a race horse at all, and I'll let him know it when I'm about to get out – if I don't make a break for it even before the race. By Christ I will. I'm a human being, and I've got thoughts and secrets, and 15 life inside me that he doesn't know is there, and he'll never know what's there because he's stupid. I suppose you'll laugh at this, me saying the governor's a stupid bastard when I hardly know how to write and he can read and write and add-up like a professor. But what I 20 say is true right enough. He's stupid, and I'm not, because I can see further into *the likes of him* than he can see into the likes of me. Admitted, we're both cunning; but I'm more cunning and I'll win in the end even if I die in prison at eighty-two, because I'll have more fun 25 and fire out of my life than he'll ever get out of his. He's read a thousand books I suppose, and for all I know he might even have written a few; but I know, as sure as

pop-eyed, with big round eyes coming out of his head
bastard, evil man. (A bastard is really a man whose parents were not married)

like hell I will (not correct English), of course I won't

the likes of him (not correct English), people like him

I'm sitting here, that what I'm writing down is worth a million to what he could ever write down. I don't care what anybody says, but that's the truth and can't be denied. I know when he talks to me and I look into his face that I'm alive and he's dead. He's as dead as a 5 doornail. If he ran ten yards he'd drop dead. If he got ten yards into what goes on in my inside he'd drop dead as well – with surprise. At the moment, it's dead blokes like him who *have the whip-hand* over blokes like me. I'm almost dead sure it'll always be like that; but even so, by 10 Christ, I'd rather be like I am – always on the run and breaking into shops for a packet of *fags* – than have the whip-hand over somebody and be dead from the toe nails up. Maybe as soon as you get the whip-hand over somebody you do go dead. By God, to say that last 15 sentence has needed a few hundred miles of long-distance running. I could no more have said that at first than I could have *took* a million-pound note from my back pocket. But it's true, you know, now I think of it again, and has always been true. And it always will be 20 true, and I'm surer of it every time I see the governor open that door and say Goodmorning *lads*.

* * *

As I run and see my breath going out into the air as if I had ten cigars stuck in different parts of my body, I think more of the little speech the governor made 25 when I first came. Be honest. I laughed so much one

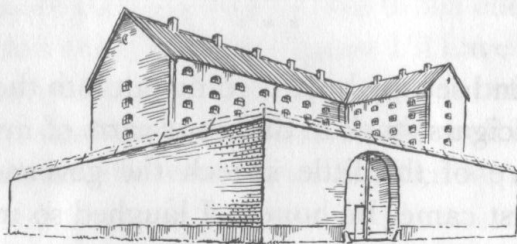
have the whip-hand, have control

fag, cigarette

took (not correct English), taken

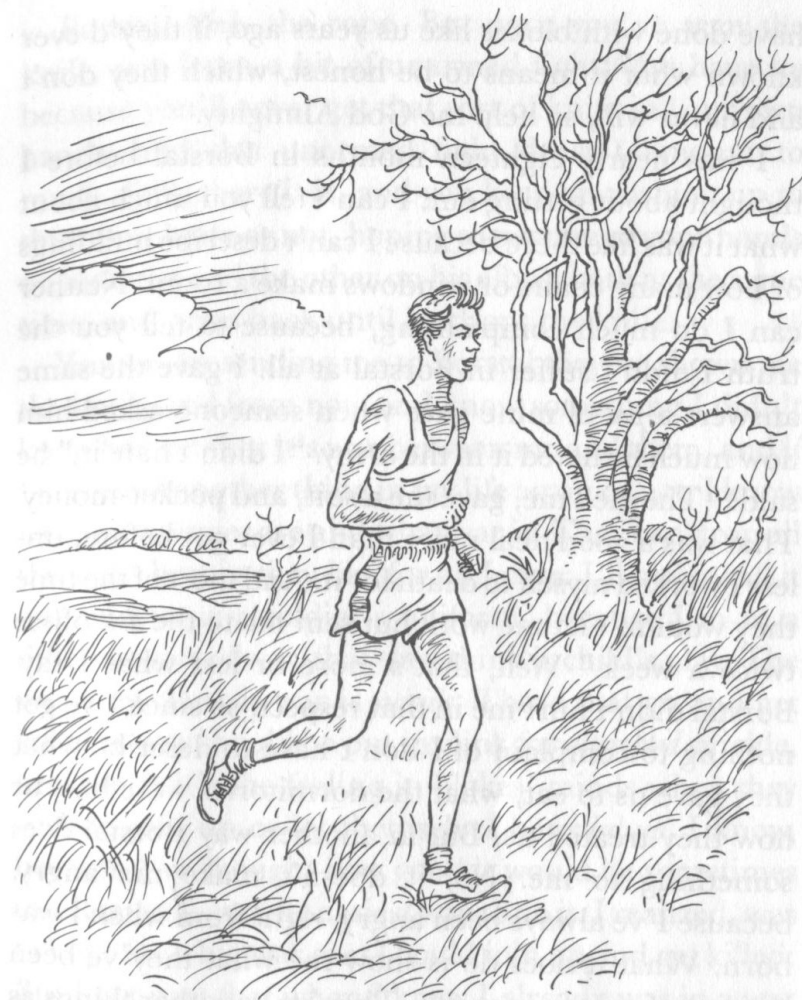
lad, boy

morning, I went ten minutes down in my timing
 because I had to stop and get rid of the laughing-pain in
 my side. The governor was so worried when I got back
 late that he sent me to the doctor's for an X-ray and to
 5 have my heart looked at. Be honest. It's like saying: Be
 dead, like me, and then it will no more be difficult to
 leave your nice broken-down house for Borstal or
 prison. Be honest and settle down in a six pounds a
 week job. Well, even with all this long-distance running
 10 I haven't yet been able to decide what he means by this,
 although I'm just about beginning to – and I don't like
 what it means. Because after all my thinking I found
 that it adds up to something that can't be true about
 me, being born and brought up as I was. Because
 15 another thing people like the governor will never
 understand is that I **am** honest, that I've never been
 anything else but honest, and that I'll always be honest.
 Sounds funny. But it's true, because I know what
 honest means according to me and he only knows what
 20 it means according to him. I think my honesty is the
 only sort in the world, and he thinks his is the only sort
 in the world as well. That's why this dirty great *walled-up*



walled-up house

house in the middle of nowhere has been used to shut
 up blokes like me. And if I had the whip-hand I
 25 wouldn't even bother to build a place like this to put all



the cops, governors, high-class *whores*, *penpushers*, army
 officers, Members of Parliament in; no, I'd stick them
 up against a wall and *let them have it*. That's what they'd

whore, prostitute: a woman who will make love for money

penpusher, office worker

let them have it (here), shoot them

have done with blokes like us years ago, if they'd ever known what it means to be honest, which they don't and never will, so help me God Almighty.

I was nearly eighteen months in Borstal before I
5 thought about getting out. I can't tell you much about what it was like there because I can't describe buildings or how many chairs or windows make a room. Neither can I do much complaining, because to tell you the truth I didn't suffer in Borstal at all. I gave the same
10 answers a *pal* of mine gave when someone asked him how much he hated it in the army. "I didn't hate it," he said. "They fed me, gave me a suit, and pocket-money. That was a good deal more than I ever got before, unless I worked myself to death for it. And most of the time
15 they wouldn't let me work but sent me to the *dole* office twice a week." Well, that's more or less what I say. Borstal didn't hurt me in that respect, so since I've got nothing to complain of I don't have to describe what they gave us to eat, what the dormitories were like, or
20 how they treated us. But in another way Borstal does something to me. No, it doesn't make me angry, because I've always been angry, right from when I was born. What it does do is show me what they've been trying to frighten me with. They've got other things as
25 well, like prison and, in the end, the rope. It's like me rushing up to *thump* a man and grab the coat off his back when, suddenly, I stop, because he takes out a knife and lifts it to stick me like a pig if I come too close. That knife

pal, friend

dole, money given by the state to people who have no work

thump, hit

is Borstal, *clink*, the rope. But once you've seen the knife, you learn a bit of unarmed fight. You have to, because you'll never get that sort of knife in your own hands, and this unarmed fight doesn't amount to
5 much. Still, there it is, and you keep on rushing up to this man, knife or not, hoping to get one of your hands on his wrist and the other on his elbow both at the same time, and press back until he drops the knife.

You see, by sending me to Borstal they've shown me the knife, and from now on I know something I didn't
10 know before: that it's war between me and them, and if I ever *pinch* another thing in my life again or not, I know who my enemies are and what war is. They can drop all the atom bombs they like for all I care: I'll never call it war and wear a soldier's uniform, because I'm in a
15 different sort of war, that they think is child's play. The war they think is war is *suicide*. Those that go and get killed in war should be put in *clink* for *attempted* suicide, because that's the feeling in blokes' minds when they rush to join up or let themselves be *called up*. I know,
20 because I've thought how good it would be sometimes to kill myself; and the easiest way to do it, I realized, was to hope for a big war *so as* I could join up and get killed. But I got past that when I knew I already was in a war of my own, that I was born into one: I grew up hearing
25

clink, prison

pinch, steal

suicide, killing oneself

attempt, try

called up, called to service in the army

so as (not correct English), so that

the sound of "old soldiers" who'd been *over the top* at Dartmoor, half killed at Lincoln, caught in no-man's-land at Borstal. That war sounded louder than any German bombs. Government wars aren't my wars; 5 they've got nothing to do with me.

* * *

I remember when I was fourteen and I went out into the country with three of my cousins, all about the same age. These blokes later went to different Borstals, and then to different regiments, from which they soon 10 deserted, and then to different prisons, where they still are as far as I know. But anyway, we were all *kids* then, and wanted to go out to the woods for a change, to get away from the roads one summer. We climbed over fences and went through fields, pinching a few sour 15 apples on our way, until we saw the wood about a mile off. Up Colliers' Pad we heard another lot of kids talking in high-school voices behind a hedge. We crept up on them and looked through the bushes, and saw they were eating a picnic, a real fine lunch out of 20 baskets and *flasks*. There must have been about seven of them, lads and girls sent out by their mams and *dads* for the afternoon. So we went on our stomachs through the hedge like crocodiles and surrounded them. Then 25 thumping them and grabbing all there was to eat. Then

old soldier, prisoner
over the top, into battle

Dartmoor, prison in Devon in south west England, from which it is very difficult to escape

kid, child

dad, father



we ran off over Cherry Orchard fields into the wood, with a man chasing us who'd come up while we were breaking up their picnic, but got away all right, and had a good feed into the bargain.

Well, I'll always feel during every bit of my life like 5 those daft kids should have felt before we broke them

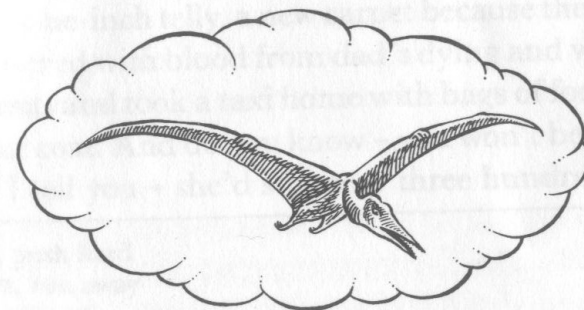
up. But they never dreamed that what happened was going to happen. Just like the governor of this Borstal. He talks to us about honesty and all that stuff but he don't know a bloody thing; while I know every minute
 5 of my life that a big boot is always likely to spoil any nice picnic I might be daft and dishonest enough to make for myself. I admit that there've been times when I've thought of telling the governor all this, so as to put him on his guard. But when I've got as close as seeing him
 10 I've changed my mind: I'll let him either find out for himself or go through the same mill as I've gone through. I'm not hard-hearted (in fact I've helped a few blokes in my time with *a quid*, a fag, or a shelter from the rain when they've been on the run); but I'm not going
 15 to risk being put in the cells just for trying to give the governor a bit of advice he don't deserve. If my heart's soft I know the sort of people I'm going to save it for. And any advice I'd give the governor wouldn't do him the least bit of good; it'd only *trip him up* sooner than if
 20 he wasn't told at all, which I suppose is what I want to happen. But for the time being, I'll let things go on as they are, which is something else I've learned in the last year or two. (It's a good job I can only think of these things as fast as I can write with this bit of pencil that's
 25 in my hand, otherwise I'd have dropped the whole thing weeks ago.)

By the time I'm half way through my morning run, when after a frost-bitten sunrise I can see a bit of sunlight hanging from the bare branches, and when

a quid, one pound, £1

trip him up, put something between his feet to make him fall

I've measured my half way mark by the steep bush-covered bank by the sunken lane, when still there's not a soul in sight and not a sound except the neighing of some horse, I get to thinking the deepest of all. The governor wouldn't believe his eyes if he could see me
 5 sliding down the bank, because I could break my neck or ankle. But I can't not do it, because it's the only risk I take and the only excitement I ever get, flying flat out like one of them *pterodactyls* from the "*Lost World*" I heard
 10 once on the wireless. Coming down the bank, I hurt my arms and legs and almost let myself go but not quite. It's the most wonderful minute because there's not one thought or word or picture of anything in my head while I'm going down. I'm empty, as empty as I was
 15 before I was born. And I don't let myself go, I suppose, because whatever it is that's farthest down inside me don't want me to die or hurt myself bad. And it's stupid to think deep, you know, because it gets you nowhere. But deep is what I am when I've passed this half way
 20 mark. The long-distance run of an early morning makes me think that every run like this is a life – a little life, I know – but a life full of misery and happiness and



pterodactyl

The Lost World, story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930)

things happening. After a lot of these runs, I thought that you didn't need to be very clever to tell how a life was going to end once it had got well started. But as usual I was wrong, caught first by the cops and then by
5 my own bad brain. I could never trust myself to fly over these traps, I was always tripped up sooner or later, no matter how many I got over without even knowing it. Looking back, I suppose them big trees put their branches to their noses and closed their eyes, and there
10 I was flying down the bank and not seeing a bloody thing.

I don't say to myself: "You shouldn't have done the job, and then you'd have stayed away from Borstal." No, what I *ram* into my head is this: my luck had no right to *scram* just when I was beginning to make the coppers think I hadn't done the job after all. The time was
5 autumn and the night foggy enough to set me and my *mate* Mike walking about the streets when we should have been sitting in front of the *telly*; but I was restless after six weeks away from any sort of work. You might well ask me why for so long, but you see, my dad had
10 died, and mam collected five hundred from the factory where he'd worked.

Now I believe, and my mam must have thought the same, that a pile of new blue-black *fivers* *ain't* any good unless they're flying out of your hand into some shop-
15 keeper's, and the shopkeeper is passing you tiptop things over the counter. So as soon as she got the money, mam took me and my five brothers and sisters out to town and got us some new clothes. Then she ordered a twenty-one-inch telly, a new carpet because the old one
20 was covered with blood from dad's dying and wouldn't wash out, and took a taxi home with bags of food and a new fur coat. And do you know – you won't believe me when I tell you – she'd still near three hundred left in

ram, push hard

scram, run away

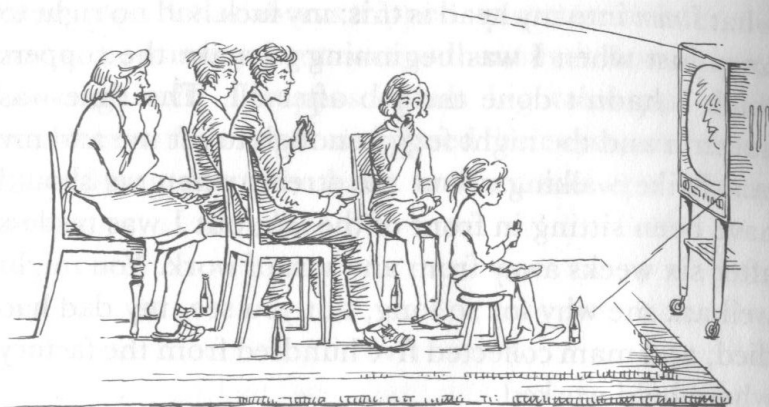
mate, friend

telly, television

fiver, five-pound note

ain't (not correct English) here: isn't; (also) aren't, haven't, hasn't, am not

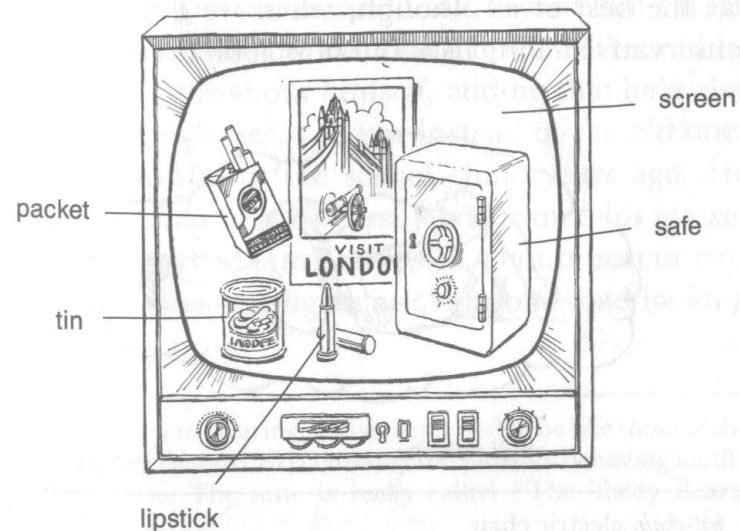
her handbag the next day, so how could any of us go to work after that? Poor old dad, he didn't get a look in, and he was the one who'd done the suffering and dying for such a lot of nice things.



5 Night after night we sat in front of the telly with a sandwich in one hand, a bar of chocolate in the other, and a bottle of lemonade between our boots, and I'd never known a family as happy as ours was in that couple of months when we'd got all the money we
10 needed. And when the *dough* ran out I didn't think about anything much, but just wandered about the streets. I was looking for another job, I told mam - hoping to get my hands on another five hundred so's
15 it's surprising how quick you can get used to a different life. To begin with, the adverts on the telly had shown us how much more there was in the world to buy than we'd ever dreamed of when we'd looked into shop windows.

dough, money

Then, we hadn't seen all there was to see, because we didn't have the money to buy it with. And the telly made all these things seem twenty times better than we'd ever thought they were. Even adverts at the
5 cinema were cool and ordinary, because now we were seeing them in private at home. We used to turn up our noses at things in shops that didn't move; but suddenly we saw their real value, because they jumped around
10 the screen and had some girl running to get her nail-polished fingers on to them or her *lipstick* lips over them, not like the adverts you saw on the streets or in
15 newspapers as dead as doornails. These things were moving around loose, half open *packets* and *tins*, making you think that all you had to do was finish opening them before they were yours. It was like seeing an open *safe*
through a shop window, with the man gone away for a cup of tea without thinking to guard his money. The films they showed were good as well, in that way,



because we couldn't take our eyes from the cops chasing the robbers, who had bags of money and looked like getting away to spend it – until the last moment. I always hoped they would get away, and could never stop
 5 wanting to put my hand out, smash into the screen and get the copper in a *half-nelson* so's he'd stop following the bloke with the money-bags. Even when he'd shot a couple of bank clerks I hoped he wouldn't get caught. In fact then I wished more than ever he wouldn't,
 10 because it meant the *hot-chair* if he did. And I wouldn't wish that on anybody, no matter what they'd done; I'd read in a book where the hot-chair wasn't a quick death at all, but that you just sat there burning to death until you were dead. And it was when these cops were
 15 chasing the *crooks* that we played some good tricks with the telly. When one of them opened his big mouth to talk about getting their man, I'd turn the sound down and see his mouth move like a fish – it was so funny the whole family nearly fell on the new carpet laughing. It
 20 was the best of all, though, when we did it to some conservative telling us about how good his government



half-nelson

hot-chair, electric chair
crook, bad man

was going to be if we kept on voting for them. Their big mouths were rolling and opening, so that you could see they didn't mean a word they said, especially with not a word coming out because we'd cut off the sound. When the governor of the Borstal first talked to me, I
 5 was reminded of those times so much that I nearly killed myself trying not to laugh. Yes, we played so many good tricks on the box that mam used to call us the Telly Boys, we got so clever at it.

* * *

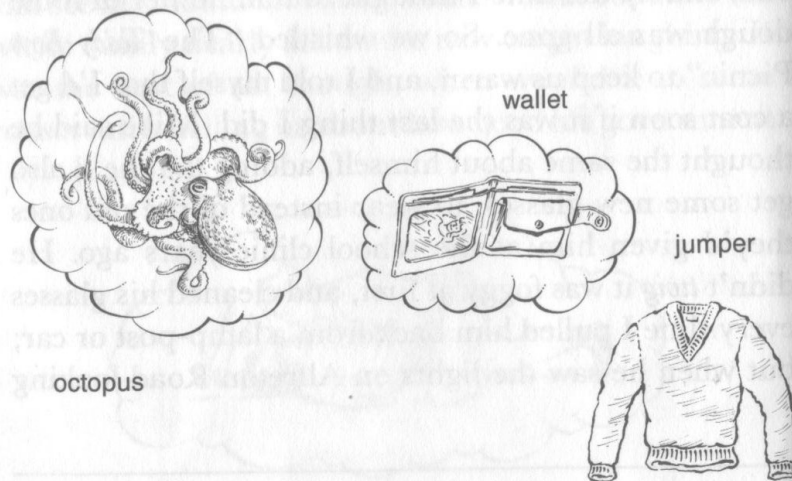
So on this foggy night Mike and me tore ourselves away
 10 from the telly and banged the front door behind us. We set off up our wide street like slow boats lost on a river, for we didn't know where the housefronts began because of the cold mist all around. I was dying of cold without an overcoat: mam had forgotten to buy me
 15 one, and by the time I thought to remind her of it the dough was all gone. So we whistled "The *Teddy Boys Picnic*" to keep us warm, and I told myself that I'd get a coat soon if it was the last thing I did. Mike said he thought the same about himself, adding that he'd also
 20 get some new glasses, to wear instead of the old ones they'd given him at the school clinic years ago. He didn't *twig* it was foggy at first, and cleaned his glasses every time I pulled him back from a lamp-post or car; but when he saw the lights on Alfreton Road looking
 25

Teddy boy, a youth wearing clothes supposed to be like those of the time of King Edward VII (1901–10) and possibly behaving loudly in the streets. The tune is really called "The Teddy Bears' Picnic".

twig, notice and understand

like *octopus* eyes he put the glasses in his pocket and didn't wear them again until we did the job. We hadn't got a penny between us, and though we weren't hungry we wished we'd got a *bob* or two when we passed the fish and chip shops, because the smell of salt and frying fat made our mouths water. I don't mind telling you we walked the town from one end to the other; if our eyes weren't *glued* to the ground looking for lost *wallets* and watches, they were moving around house windows and shop doors in case we saw something easy and worth a quick visit.

Neither of us said as much as this to each other, but I know for a fact that that was what we were thinking. What I don't know – and as sure as I sit here I know I'll never know – is which of us was the first to set eyes on the baker's backyard. Oh yes, it's all right me telling myself it was me; the truth is that I've never known



bob, shilling
glued, fixed

whether it was Mike or not. I do know that I didn't see the open window until he pointed it out. "See it?" he said.

"Yes," I told him, "so let's get moving."

"But what about the wall though?" he whispered, looking a bit closer.

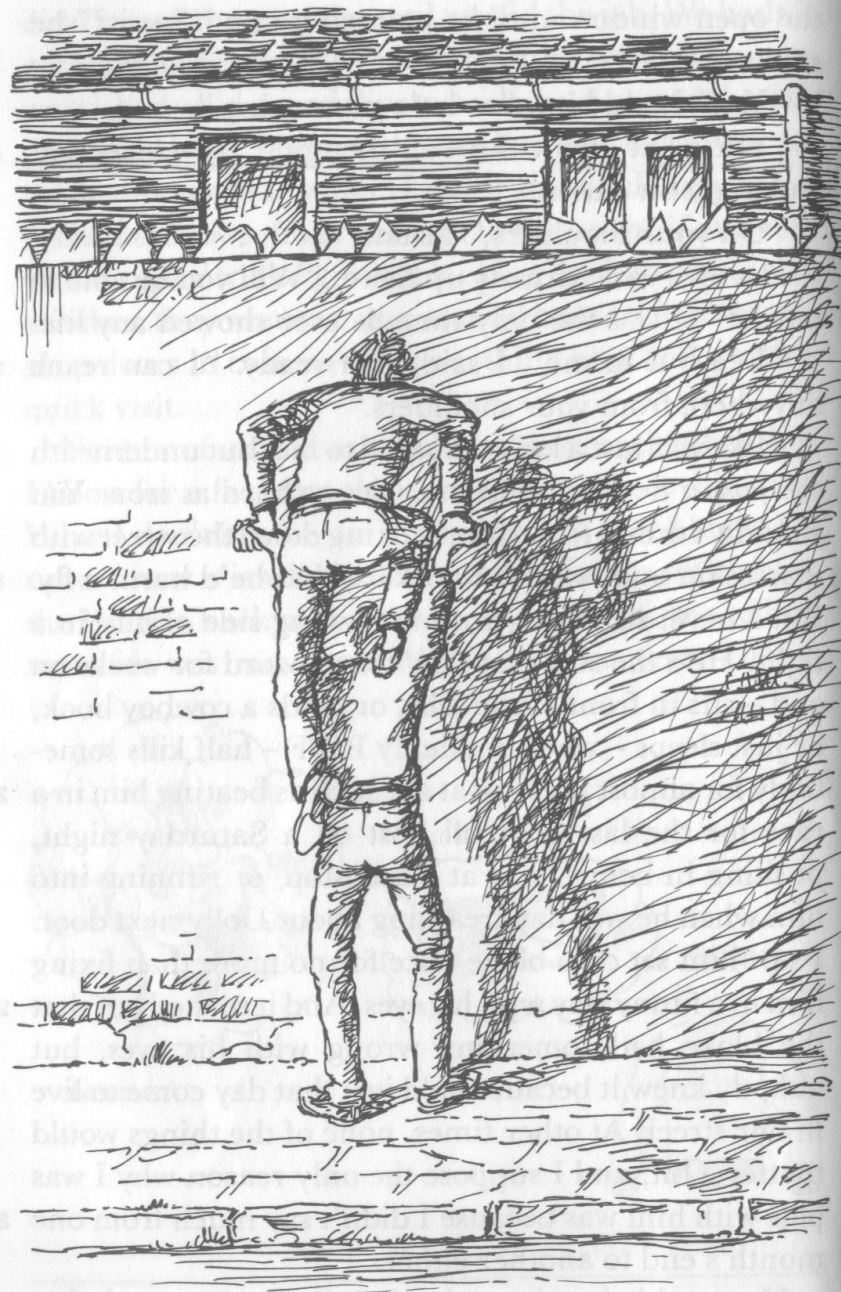
"On your shoulders," I said.

His eyes were already up there: "Will you be able to reach?" It was the only time he ever showed any life.

"Leave it to me," I said, ever-ready. "I can reach anywhere from your shoulders."

Mike was just a kid compared to me, but underneath the *jumper* he wore were muscles as hard as iron. You wouldn't think, to see him walking down the street with glasses on and hands in pockets, that he'd harm a fly. But I never liked to get on the wrong side of him in a fight. He's the sort that don't say a word for weeks on end – sits in front of the telly, or reads a cowboy book, or just sleeps – when suddenly BIFF – half kills somebody for almost nothing at all, such as beating him in a race for the last Football Post on a Saturday night, pushing in before him at a bus stop, or running into him when he was daydreaming about Dolly next door. I saw him set on a bloke once for no more than fixing him in a funny way with his eyes. And it turned out that the bloke had something wrong with his eyes, but nobody knew it because he'd just that day come to live in our street. At other times, none of the things would matter a bit, and I suppose the only reason why I was pals with him was because I didn't say much from one month's end to another either.

He put his hands up in the air like he was being covered with a gun, and moved to the wall like he was



going to be shot down. And I climbed up on him like he was a ladder, and there he stood, holding his hands flat and turned out so's I could step on 'em, not a sound of a breath coming from him. I lost no time, took my coat from between my teeth, moved it up to the glass-topped wall and was sitting on top before I knew where I was. Then down the other side, with my legs rammed up into my throat when I hit the ground. Then I picked myself up and opened the gate for Mike, who was still grinning and full of life because the hardest part of the job was already done. "I came, I broke, I entered," like that Borstal song.

I didn't think about anything at all, as usual, because I never do when I'm busy. When I'm wondering what's the best way to get a window open or how to force a door, how can I be thinking or have anything on my mind? That's what the bloke in the white coat couldn't understand when he asked me questions for days and days after I got to Borstal; and I couldn't explain it to him like I'm writing it down now; and even if I'd been able to, maybe he still wouldn't have understood. I don't know whether I can understand it myself even at this moment, though I'm doing my best.

So before I knew where I was I was inside the baker's office watching Mike picking up that *cash* box after he'd struck a match to see where it was. "Out," he suddenly said, shaking it so's we could hear it. "Let's scam."

"Maybe there's some more," I said, pulling half a dozen *drawers* out of a desk.

cash, money
drawer: see picture, page 36

"No," he said, like he'd already been twenty years in the game. "This is the lot," patting his cash box, "This is it."

I pulled out another few drawers, full of bills, books
5 and letters. "How do you know, you *loony* bastard."

He ran past me like a bull at a gate. "Because I do."

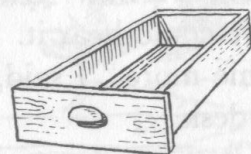
Right or wrong, we'd both got to stick together and do the same thing. I looked at an ever-loving brand-new typewriter, but knew it was too easy for the police
10 to find, so blew it a kiss, and went out after him. "Hang on," I said, pulling the door to, "we're in no hurry."

"*Not much we aren't*," he says over his shoulder.

"We've got months to spend the dough," I whispered as we crossed the yard, "only don't let the gate *creak* too
15 much."

"You think I'm loony?" he said, creaking the gate so that the whole street heard.

I don't know about Mike, but now I started to think of how we'd get back safe through the streets with that
20 moneybox up my jumper. Because he'd put it into my hand as soon as we'd got to the main road, which might have meant he'd started thinking as well. And that only goes to show how you don't know what's in anybody else's mind unless you think about things yourself. But
25 as far as my thinking went at that moment, it wasn't up



drawer

loony, mad

not much we aren't (not correct English), oh yes we are

creak, make a sound like that of an uncoiled door

to much. It was only a bit of a fright, about what we'd say if a copper asked us where we were off to with that *hump* in my inside.

"What is it?" he'd ask, and I'd say: "A growth."

"What do you mean, a growth, my lad?" he'd say
5 back. I'd cough and hold my stomach like I was on my way to the hospital, and Mike would take my arm like he was the best pal I'd got. "*Cancer*," I'd manage to say. "A lad of your age?" So I'd *groan* again, and hope to make him feel a real bastard, which would be
10 impossible, but anyway: "It's in the family. Dad died of it last month, and I'll die of it next month by the feel of it." "What, did he have it in the stomach?" "No, in the throat. But it's got me in the stomach." Groan and
15 cough. "Well, you shouldn't be out like this if you've got cancer, you should be in the hospital." I'd get irritated now: "That's where I'm trying to go if only you'd let me and stop asking so many questions. Aren't I, Mike?" Then, just in time, the copper would tell us to get on our way, kind all of a sudden, saying that the
20 hospital doors close at twelve, so hadn't he better call us a taxi? He would if we liked, he says, and he'd pay for it as well. But we tell him not to bother, that he's a good bloke even if he is a copper, that we know a quick way to get there. Then, just as we're turning a corner, he
25 gets it into his big head that we're going the opposite way to the hospital, and calls us back. So we'd start to run ... if you can call all that thinking.

* * *

hump, large mass, like that on the back of a camel

cancer, a serious illness with something growing inside the body

groan, make a deep sound as if in pain

Up in my room, Mike opens that moneybox with a hammer, and before we know where we are we've got seventy-eight pounds fifteen and fourpence ha'penny **each**, lying all over my bed like tea spread out on
 5 Christmas Day: all shared and shared alike between

<u>£</u>	<u>s.</u>	<u>d.</u>
78	15	4½
78	15	4½
<hr/>		
157	10	9

Mike and me. I thought how good it was that blokes like that poor baker didn't put all his cash in one of the big banks that take up every corner of the town. I thought how lucky for us that he didn't trust the banks no
 10 matter how many millions of tons of stone or how many iron bars and boxes they were made of, or how many coppers kept their blue eyes glued on to them. I thought how wonderful it was that he believed in moneyboxes when so many shopkeepers thought it old-fashioned
 15 and tried to be modern by using a bank; that wouldn't give a couple of honest, hardworking blokes like Mike and me a chance.

Now you'd think, and I'd think, that we'd done as fine a job as could ever be done. The baker's shop was
 20 at least a mile from where we lived, and not a soul had seen us, and there was the fog, and we weren't more than five minutes in the place. So you'd think that the coppers should never have been able to know it was us. But then, you'd be wrong, and I'd be wrong, and every-
 25 body else would be wrong.

Even so, Mike and I didn't throw the money about, because that would have made people think straight-



away that we'd found something that didn't belong to us. Which wouldn't do at all, because even in a street like ours there are people who love to do a good turn for the coppers, though I never know why they do. So we didn't do anything to let people know how rich we were. 5

We did nothing like going down town and coming back dressed in brand new Teddy boy suits and carrying a set of drums, like another pal of ours who'd done a factory office about six months before. No, we took the bobs
 5 and pennies out and folded the notes and pushed them up the *drainpipe* outside the door in the backyard. "Nobody'll ever think of looking for it there," I said to Mike. "We'll do nothing for a week or two, then take a few quid a week out till it's all gone. We might be
 10 thieving bastards, but we're not green."

* * *

Some days later a *plainclothes dick* knocked at the door. And asked for me. I was still in bed, at eleven o'clock, when I heard mam calling me. "A man to see you," she said. "Hurry up, or he'll be gone."

15 I could hear her keeping on at the back door, talking about how fine it had been but how it looked like rain since early this morning – and he didn't answer her except with a short yes or no. I pulled my trousers on quickly and wondered why he'd come – knowing it
 20 was a copper because 'a man to see you' always means just that in our house. And if I'd had any idea that a copper had gone to Mike's house as well at the same

drainpipe



plainclothes, not in uniform
dick, detective



time, I'd have twigged it to be because of that hundred and fifty quid's worth of paper pushed up the drainpipe outside the back door about ten inches away from that plain-clothed copper's boot. Mam was still talking to him, thinking she was helping me. I was wishing to God
 5 she'd ask him in, though on second thoughts I realized that that would seem more suspicious than keeping him outside: they know we hate them, and they soon think

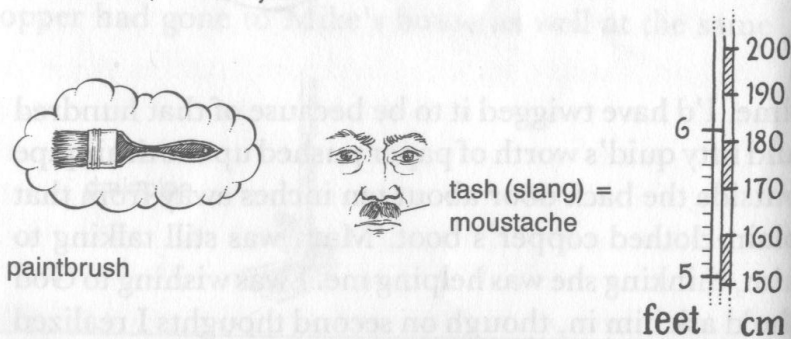
something's wrong if they see we're trying to be nice to them. Mam wasn't born yesterday, I thought, thumping my way down the creaking stairs.

I'd seen him before: a detective who'd never had as much in his pockets as was in that drainpipe. He was like Hitler in the face, right down to the *paintbrush tash*, except that being *six-foot* tall made him seem worse. But I straightened my shoulders to look into his stupid blue eyes – like I always do with any copper.

Then he started asking me questions, and my mother from behind said: "He's never left that television set for the last three months, so you've got nothing on him, mate. You might as well look for somebody else, because you're wasting the *tax* money that comes out of my pay-packet, standing there like that" – which was a laugh because she'd never paid any tax to my knowledge, and never would, I hoped.

"Well, you know where Papplewick Street is, don't you?" the copper asked me, taking no notice of mam. "Ain't it off Alfreton Road?" I asked him back, helpful and bright.

"You know there's a baker's half way down on the left hand side, don't you?"



tax, money paid to the town or to the state

"Ain't it next door to a pub, then?" I wanted to know.

He answered me sharp: "No, it bloody well ain't." Coppers always lose their tempers as quick as this, and more often than not they gain nothing by it. "Then I don't know it," I told him, saved by the bell.

He slid his big boot round and round on the doorstep. "Where were you last Friday night?" Back in the ring, but this was worse than a boxing match.

I didn't like him trying to accuse me of something he wasn't sure I'd done. "Was I at the baker's, you mentioned? Or in the pub next door?"

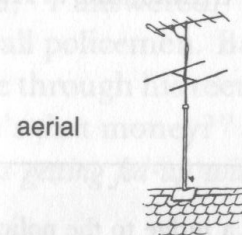
"You'll get five years in Borstal if you don't give me a straight answer," he said, opening his coat even though it was cold where he was standing.

"I was glued to the telly, like mam says," I swore blind. But he went on and on with his loony questions: "Have you got a television?"

The things he asked wouldn't have fooled a kid of two, and what else could I say to the last one except: "Has the *aerial* fell down? Or would you like to come in and see it?"

He was liking me even less for saying that. "We know you weren't listening to the television set last Friday, and so do you, don't you?"

"P'raps not, but I was **looking** at it, because some-



fell (not correct English), fallen

times we turn the sound down for a bit of fun.” I could hear mam laughing from the kitchen, and I hoped Mike’s mam was doing the same if the cops had gone to him as well.

5 “We know you weren’t in the house,” he said, starting up again. They always say ‘We’ ‘We’, never ‘I’ ‘I’ – as if they feel braver and righter knowing there’s a lot of them against only one.

10 “I’ve got people who saw me,” I said to him. “Mam for one. Her friend, for two. Ain’t that enough? I can get you a dozen more, or thirteen altogether, if it was a baker’s that got robbed.”

15 “I don’t want any lies,” he said, not understanding about the *baker’s dozen*. Where do they pick cops up from anyway? “All I want is to get from you where you put that money.”

I stood back and waved him inside. “Come and search the house. If you’ve got a *warrant*.”

20 “Listen, my lad,” he said, like the dirty bastard he was, “I don’t want too much of your talk, because if we get you down to the Guildhall you’ll get a pair of black eyes for your trouble.” And I knew what he meant too, because I’d heard about all them sort of tricks. I hoped one day, though, that him and all his pals would be the
25 ones to get the black eyes; you never knew. It might come sooner than anybody thinks, like in *Hungary*. “Tell me where the money is.”

baker’s dozen, thirteen

warrant, permission given by a judge to the police to go into a house

in Hungary, during the Hungarian revolution of 1956

“What money?” I asked him, because I’d heard that one before as well.

“You know what money.”

“Do I look as though I’d know anything about money?” I said, pushing my hand through a hole in my shirt. 5

“The money that was pinched, that you know all about,” he said. “You can’t trick me, so it’s no use trying.”

“Was it three-and-eightpence ha’penny?” I asked. 10

“You thieving young bastard. We’ll teach you to steal money that doesn’t belong to you.”

I turned my head around: “Mam,” I called out, “get my lawyer on the phone, will you?”

“Clever, aren’t you?” he said in a very unfriendly way, “but we won’t rest until we clear all this up.” 15

“Look,” I said, “it’s all very well us talking like this, it’s like a game almost. But I wish you’d tell me what it’s all about. Because I’ve just got out of bed, and here you are at the door talking about me having pinched a lot of money, money that I don’t know anything about.” 20

He swung around now as if he’d trapped me, though I couldn’t see why he might think so. “Who said anything about money? I didn’t. What made you bring money into this little talk we’re having?” 25

“It’s you,” I answered, “you’ve got money on the brain, like all policemen. Baker’s shops as well.”

He spoke through his teeth: “I want an answer from you: where’s that money?”

But I *was getting fed-up with* all this. “I’ll do a deal.” 30

be getting fed-up with, have had more than enough of

Judging by his face, he thought he was suddenly on to a good thing. "What sort of a deal?"

So I told him: "I'll give you all the money I've got, one and fourpence ha'penny, if you stop all this
5 questioning, and let me go in and get my breakfast. Honest, I'm tired to death. I ain't had a bite since yesterday. Can't you hear my stomach rollin'?"

His mouth dropped open, but on he went, pumping me for another half hour. But I knew I was winning on
10 points.

Then he left, but came back in the afternoon to search the house. He didn't find a thing, not a single penny. He asked me questions again and I didn't tell him anything except lies, lies, lies, because I can go on
15 doing that forever without even shutting my eyes. He'd got nothing on me, and we both of us knew it, otherwise I'd have been down at the Guildhall in no time. But he kept on keeping on, because I'd been punished for a high-wall job before. And Mike was put through the
20 same mill because all the local cops knew he was my best pal.

* * *

When it got dark, me and Mike were in our front room with a low light on and the telly off. Mike was taking it easy in the rocking chair and me on the sofa, both of us
25 puffing a packet of fags. With the door locked and curtains drawn, we talked about the dough we'd rammed up the drainpipe. Mike thought we should take it out and both of us get off to Skegness for a good time. We'd live like lords in a hotel near the *pier*, then at
30 least we'd both have had a good time before getting sent down.



pier

"Listen, you daft idiot," I said, "we aren't going to get caught at all, **and** we'll have a good time, later." We were so clever we didn't even go out to the *pictures*, though we wanted to.

In the morning old Hitler-face questioned me again. 5 With one of his pals this time, and the next day they came, trying as hard as they could to get something out of me, but I didn't move an inch. I know I shouldn't really say this myself, but in me he'd met his equal, and I'd never give in to questions no matter how long it was
10 kept up. They searched the house a couple of times as well, which made me think they thought they really had something to go by; but I know now that they hadn't, they were just hoping. They turned the house upside
15 down and inside out like an old sock, went from top to bottom and front to back but naturally didn't find a thing. The copper even pushed his face up the front-room chimney (that hadn't been used or swept for years) and came down looking like *Al Jolson* so that he

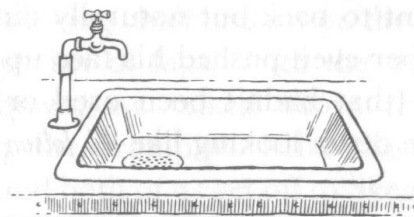
pictures, cinema

Al Jolson (1886-1950), popular American singer and blackface comedian of theatre and film

had to wash himself clean at the *sink*.

The last time he knocked at our door was one wet morning at five minutes to nine and I was asleep in my bed as usual. Mam had gone to work that day, so I
5 shouted for him to wait a bit, and then went down to see who it was. There he stood, six-feet tall and wet from top to toe, and for the first time in my life I did a thing I'll never forgive myself for: I didn't ask him to come in out of the rain, because I wanted him to get double
10 *pneumonia* and die. I suppose he could have pushed by me and come in if he'd wanted, but maybe he'd got used to asking questions on the doorstep. I should have treated him as a brother I hadn't seen for twenty years. I should have dragged him in for a cup of tea and a fag,
15 told him about the picture I hadn't seen the night before, asked him how his wife was after her operation, and then sent him happy and satisfied out by the front door. But no, I thought, let's see what he's got to say for himself now.

20 He stood a little to the side of the door, either because it was less wet there, or because he wanted to see me from a different angle, perhaps not liking to watch a bloke's face always telling lies from the same side. "You've been *identified*," he said, shaking raindrops from his tash. "A woman saw you and your mate



sink

pneumonia, infection of a lung or, if double, of both lungs
identified, recognized

yesterday, and she swears blind you are the same lads she saw going into that bakery."

I was dead sure he was lying just to trick me, because Mike and I hadn't even seen each other the day before, but I looked worried. "She's lying, whoever she is, 5 because the only bakery I've been in lately is the one up our street to get some cut bread for mam."

He didn't bite on this. "So now I want to know where the money is"- as if I hadn't answered him at all.

"I think mam took it to work this morning to get 10 herself a cup of tea." It was raining so hard I thought he'd get washed away if he didn't come inside. But I didn't care, and went on: "I remember I put it on top of the telly last night - it was my only one-and-three, and I was saving it for a packet of fags this morning. I 15 couldn't believe my eyes just now when I saw it had gone. I was reckoning on it for getting me through today, because I don't think life's worth living without a fag, do you?"

I began to feel good, twiggling that this would be my 20 last pack of lies, and that if I kept it up for long enough this time I'd have won: Mike and me would be off to the coast in a few weeks' time, having the fun of our lives. "And this weather's no good for picking up fag-ends in the street," I said, "because they'd be wet. Course, I 25 know you could dry 'em out near the fire, but it don't taste the same, you know."

I began to wonder, at the back of my head, why he didn't pull me up sharp and say he hadn't got time to listen to all this. But he wasn't looking at me anymore, 30 and all my thoughts about Skegness went bursting to bits in my head. I could have dropped into the earth when I saw what he'd fixed his eyes on.



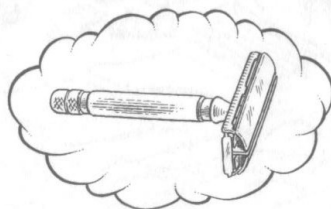
He was looking at it, an ever-loving fiver, and I thought I'd fall down in a faint. Three *greenbacks* as well had been washed down by the water, and more were following, lying flat at first after their fall, then getting turned up at the corners by the wind and rain as if they were alive and wanted to get back into the dry drainpipe out of the terrible weather. And you can't imagine how I wished they'd be able to. Old Hitler-face didn't know what to make of it, but just kept staring down and down. And I thought I'd better keep on talking, though I knew it wasn't much good now.

"It's a fact, I know, that money's hard to get, and you don't find half-crowns on bus seats, and I didn't see any in bed last night because I'd 'ave known about it, wouldn't I? You can't sleep with things like that in the bed because they're too hard, and anyway they're ..." It took Hitler-boy a long time to understand; they were beginning to spread over the yard a bit before his hand laid itself on my shoulder.

greenback, pound note

The pop-eyed *pot-bellied* governor said to a pop-eyed pot-bellied Member of Parliament who sat next to his pop-eyed pot-bellied whore of a wife that I was his only hope for getting the Borstal Prize Cup for Long-Distance
 5 Cross-Country Running (All England), which I was, and it set me laughing to myself inside. I didn't say a word to any pot-bellied pop-eyed bastard that might give them real hope. But I knew the governor took my quietness to mean he'd got that cup already on the
 10 bookshelf in his office.

"He might take up running in a professional way when he gets out." It wasn't until he'd said this that I realized it might be possible to do such a thing, run for money, and retire through old age at thirty-two with an
 15 old man's lungs and heart and legs. But I'd have a wife and car, and get my smiling long-distance face in the papers. And I'd have a pretty secretary to answer letters sent by *tarts* who'd *mob* me when they saw who I was as I pushed my way into Woolworth's for a packet of *razor*
 20 blades and a cup of tea. It was something to think about all right. And sure enough the governor knew he'd got



razor

pot-bellied, with a fat stomach
tart, whore
mob, crowd round

me when he said, turning to me as if I would at any rate have to be asked about it all: "How does this strike you, then, Smith, my lad?"

A line of pot-bellied pop-eyes shone at me, and a row of fish-mouths opened and showed me gold teeth, so I
 5 gave them the answer they wanted because I'd hold my best card until later. "It'd suit me fine, sir," I said.

"Good lad. Good show. Right spirit. Splendid."

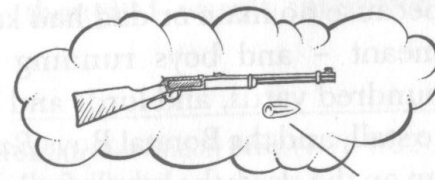
"Well," the governor said, "get that cup for us today and I'll do all I can for you. I'll get you trained so that
 10 you beat every man in the Free World." And I had a picture in my brain of me running and beating everybody in the world, leaving them all behind until only I was trot-trotting across a big wide field alone, doing a
 15 marvellous speed as I ran on between stones and grass, when suddenly: CRACK! CRACK! – *bullets* that can go faster than any man running, coming from a copper's rifle planted in a tree, got me and split my throat in spite of my perfect running, and down I fell.

The pot-bellies expected me to say something else.
 20 "Thank you, sir," I said.

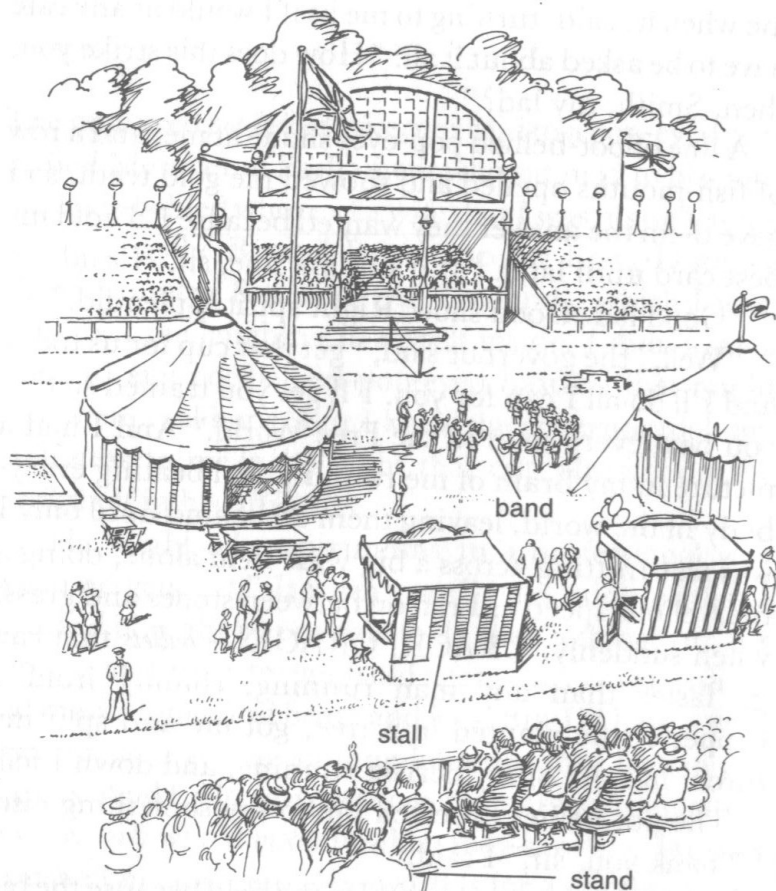
Told to go, I trotted out on to the field because the big cross-country was about to begin and the two boys from Gunthorpe had fixed themselves early at the starting
 25 line and were ready to move off like white *kangaroos*.



kangaroo



bullet



The sports ground looked fine: with big tea-tents all round and flags flying and seats for families – empty because no mam or dad had known what opening day meant – and boys running the first races for the hundred yards, and lords and ladies walking from stall to stall, and the Borstal Boys *Band* in blue uniforms; and up on the *stands* the brown jackets of Hucknall as well as our own grey blazers, and then the Gunthorpe boys with shirt sleeves rolled. The blue sky was full of sunshine and it couldn't have been a better day, and all

of the big show was like something out of *Ivanhoe* that we'd seen on the pictures a few days before.

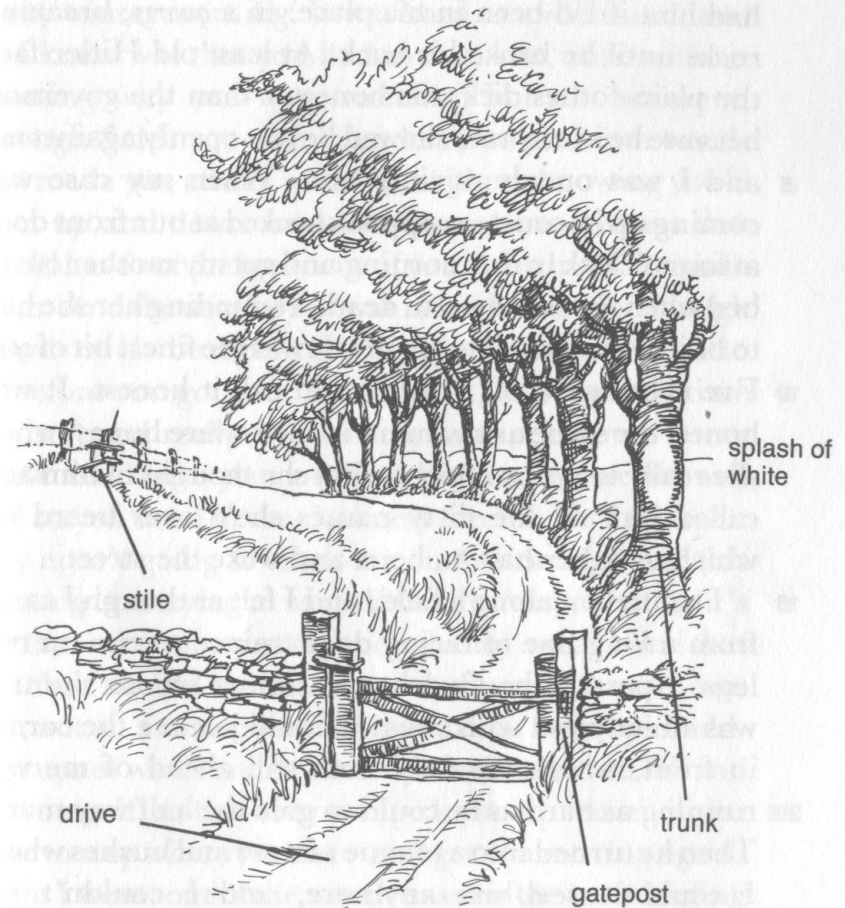
"Come on, Smith," Roach the sports master called to me, "we don't want you to be late for the big race, eh? Although I dare say you'd catch them up if you were late." The others laughed, but I took no notice and placed myself beside Gunthorpe, dropped on my knees and picked a few grass blades to have in my mouth on the way round. So the big race it was, for them, watching from the grandstand, a race for the governor, that he had been waiting for. I hoped he and all the rest of his *gang* were busy placing big *bets* on me, hundred to one to win, all the money they had in their pockets, all the wages they were going to get for the next five years, and the more they placed the happier I'd be. Because I was going to go down dying with laughter whether it stuck in my throat and killed me or not. My knees felt the cool soil pressing into them, and out of my eye's corner I saw Roach lift his hand. The Gunthorpe boys moved before the signal was given; somebody *cheered* too soon; Medway bent forward; then the gun went, and I was away.

We went once around the field and then along a half-mile *drive* of tall trees being cheered all the way, and I seemed to feel I was in the lead as we went out by the gate and into the lane, though I wasn't interested

Ivanhoe, story (1819) of olden days by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), filmed in 1952 starring Elizabeth Taylor
gang, group of people who work or go around together
bet, money placed as a risk
cheer, shout hurrah
drive: see picture, page 57

enough to find out. The five-mile course was marked by
splashes of white paint on *gateposts* and *trunks* and stones,
 and a boy with a waterbottle stood every half-mile
 waiting for those that dropped out or fainted. Over the
 5 first *stile*, without trying, I was still nearly in the lead but
 one. And if any of you want tips about running, never
 be in a hurry, and never let any of the other runners
 know you are in a hurry even if you are. You can always
 overtake on long-distance running without letting the
 10 others smell the hurry in you; and when you've reached
 the two or three up front, then you can *put on a big spurt*
 later because you've not had to make haste up till then.
 I ran to a steady jogtrot rhythm. Soon it was so smooth
 that I forgot I was running. I was hardly able to know
 15 that my legs were lifting and falling and my arms going
 in and out. My lungs didn't seem to be working at all,
 and my heart stopped that wicked thumping I always
 get at the beginning of a run. Because, you see, I never
 race at all; I just run. If I forget I'm racing and only
 20 jogtrot along until I don't know I'm running, I always
 win the race. For when my eyes recognize that I'm
 getting near the end of the course, I put on a spurt; and
 such a fast spurt it is because I feel that up till then I
 haven't been running and that I've used up no energy
 25 at all. And I've been able to do this because I've been
 thinking; and I wonder if I'm the only one in the
 running business with this system of forgetting that I'm
 running because I'm too busy thinking; and I wonder
 if any of the other lads do the same, though I know
 30 for a fact that they don't. Off like the wind along the

put on a spurt, go faster, usually for a short while



footpath and lane, I was in my element that afternoon,
 knowing that nobody could beat me at running but
 intending to beat myself before the day was over. For
 when the governor talked to me of being honest, he
 didn't know what the word meant or he wouldn't have
 had me here in this race, trotting along in shimmy and
 shorts and sunshine. He'd have had me where I'd have

had him if I'd been in his place: in a *quarry*, breaking rocks until he broke his back. At least old Hitler-face the plainclothes dick was honester than the governor, because he at any rate showed he was openly against me
5 and I was openly against him. When my case was coming up in court, a copper knocked at our front door at four o'clock in the morning and got my mother out of bed when she was tired to death, reminding her she had to be in court at half past nine. It was the finest bit of *spite*
10 I've ever heard of, but I would call it honest. It was honest the same as my mam's words were honest when she really told that copper what she thought of him and called him all the dirty names she'd ever heard of, which took her half an hour and woke the street.

15 I trotted on along a field, and I felt as though I came from a long line of racing dogs trained to run on two legs. I passed the Gunthorpe runner whose shimmy was already wet with sweat. I could just see the corner in front, where the only man still ahead of me was
20 running as hard as he could to gain the half way mark. Then he turned into a tongue of trees and bushes where I couldn't see him anymore, and I couldn't see anybody. And I knew what the loneliness of the long-distance runner running across country felt like: this
25 feeling was the only honesty and realness there was in the world, no matter what anybody else tried to tell me. The runner behind me must have been a long way off, because it was so quiet, and there was even less noise and movement than there had been at five o'clock of a

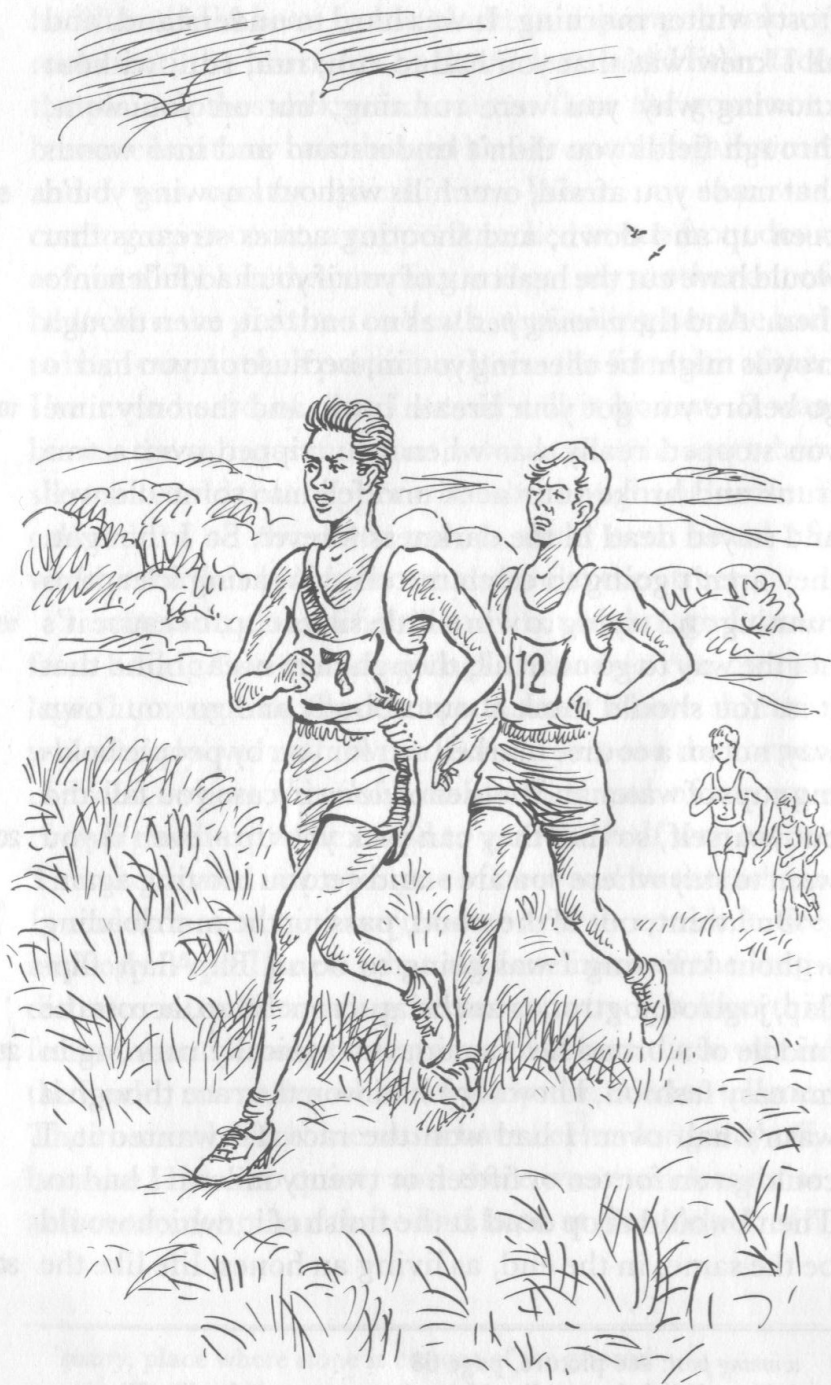
quarry, place where stone is cut out of the ground
spite, ill will

frosty winter morning. It was hard to understand, and all I knew was that you had to run, run, run, without knowing why you were running; but on you went, through fields you didn't understand and into woods that made you afraid, over hills without knowing you'd
5 been up and down, and shooting across streams that would have cut the heart out of you if you had fallen into them. And the *winning post* was no end to it, even though crowds might be cheering you in, because on you had to go before you got your breath back; and the only time
10 you stopped really was when you tripped over a tree trunk and broke your neck and fell into some old well and stayed dead in the darkness forever. So I thought: they aren't going to catch me on this racing idea, this running and trying to win a little silver cup, because it's
15 not the way to go on at all, though they swear blind that it is. You should think about nobody and go your own way, not on a course marked out for you by people holding cups of water and bottles of *iodine* in case you fall and cut yourself, so that they can pick you up – even if you
20 want to stay where you are – and get you moving again.

On I went, out of the wood, passing the man leading without knowing I was going to do so. Flip-flap, flip-flap, jogtrot, jogtrot, crunchslap-crunchslap, across the middle of a broad field again, rhythmically running in
25 my easy fashion, knowing I had won the race though it wasn't half over. I had won the race if I wanted it, I could go on for ten or fifteen or twenty miles if I had to. Then I would drop dead at the finish of it, which would be the same, in the end, as living an honest life like the
30

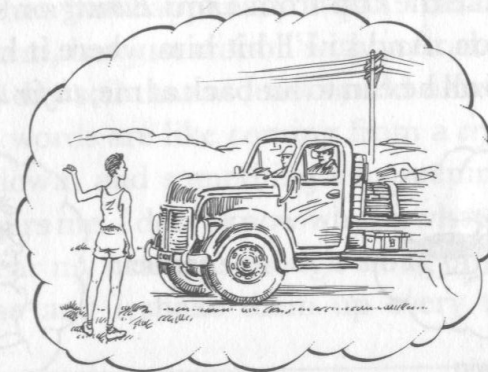
winning post: see picture, page 68

iodine, reddish-brown liquid used to prevent infection in a cut



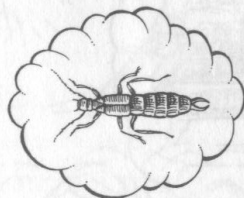
governor wanted me to. This all meant: win the race and be honest. And on trot-trotting I went, having a fine time, loving it because it did me good and set me thinking, which by now I liked to do. But I didn't care at all when I remembered that I had to win this race as well as run it. One of the two, I had to win the race or run it; and I knew I could do both, because my legs had carried me well in front. I knew my legs would carry me further, because they seemed made of electric wire and easily alive to keep on going. But I'm not going to win. I'd only want to come in first if winning meant that I was going to escape the coppers after doing the biggest bank job of my life. But winning means the exact opposite: running into their white-gloved hands and smiling faces and staying there for the rest of my natural long life of stone-breaking.

Another honest thought that comes is that I could swing left at the next hedge of the field, and I could do three or six or a dozen miles across a few roads so's they'd never know which one I'd taken; and maybe on the last one, when it got dark, I could *thumb a lorry lift* and



thumbing a lorry lift

get a free ride north with somebody who might not give me away. But no, I said I wasn't daft, didn't I? I won't make a break for it with only six months left, and besides there's nothing I want to run away from. I only
 5 want to hit back a bit at the In-laws by letting them sit up there and watch me lose this race. Of course, I know as sure as God made me that when I do lose I'll get the dirtiest kitchen jobs in the months to go before my time is up. I won't be worth a penny to anybody here, which
 10 will be all the thanks I get for being honest in the only way I know. For when the governor told me to be honest, it was meant to be in his way and not mine. If I kept on being honest in the way he wanted, and won my race for him, he'd see I got the easiest six months still
 15 left to run; but in my own way, well, it's not allowed. And if I do things the way I am going to now, he'll punish me for it. And if you look at it in my way, who can blame him? For this is war – and ain't I said so? – and I shall hit him in the only place he knows. And then
 20 he'll be sure to hit back at me for not getting him that cup. For years, his heart's been set on seeing himself standing up at the end of the afternoon to pat me on the back as I take the cup from Lord *Earwig* or some such stupid person. And so I'll hit him where it hurts a lot,
 25 and he'll do all he can to hit back at me, *tut for tat*. But I'll



earwig

uppercut



tut for tat, blow for blow

enjoy it most because I'm hitting first, and because I planned it longer. I don't know why I think these thoughts are better than any I've ever had, but I do, and I don't care why. I suppose it took me a long time to get going on all this, because I've had no time and peace in
 5 all my bandit life, and now my thoughts are coming easily. And all this is another *uppercut* I'm getting in first at people like the governor, to show how – if I can – his races are never won even though some bloke always
 10 comes in first. And so this story's like the race, and once again I won't go and win to suit the governor. No, I'm being honest like he told me to, without him knowing what he means. But I don't suppose he'll ever come in with a story of his own, even if he reads this one of mine
 15 and knows who I'm talking about.

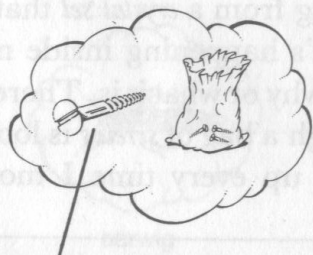
I've just come up out of the sunken lane, and the race is two-thirds over, and a voice is going like a wireless in my mind. The voice is saying that when you've had enough of feeling good like the first man on earth of a frosty morning, and when you've known how it is to
 20 feel bad like the last man on earth on a summer's afternoon, then you get at last to being like the only man on earth. When that happens, you don't care about either good or bad, but just trot on with your shoes slapping the good dry soil that at least would never harm you.
 25 Now the words are like coming from a *crystal set* that's broken down, and something's happening inside me that bothers me. I don't know why or what it is. There's a pain near my heart, as though a bag of *screws* is loose inside me and I shake them up every time I move
 30

crystal set, old kind of radio

screw: see picture, page 64

forward. But I know it's nothing to bother about, that more likely it's caused by too much thinking, which now and again seems to me like worry. For sometimes I'm the greatest worrier in the world (as you twigged, 5 I'm sure, from me having got this story out). And that's funny, because my mam don't know the meaning of the word worry. So I haven't got it from her. But dad had a hard time of worry all his life, up until he filled his bedroom with hot blood and kicked the bucket that 10 morning when nobody was in the house. I'll never forget it, because I was the one that found him and I often wished I hadn't.

Gunthorpe nearly caught me up. Birds were singing from the hedge, and a couple of *thrushes* flew away into 15 some bushes. Grass had grown high in the next field and would be cut down soon; but I never wanted to notice much while running, in case it spoiled my rhythm. So by the *haystack* I decided to leave it all behind, and I put on such a spurt that before long I'd 20 left both Gunthorpe and the birds a good way off. I wasn't far now from going into that last mile and a half like a knife through margarine. But the quietness I suddenly trotted into was like opening my eyes under water and looking at the little round stones on a stream



screw



thrush



haystack

bottom. It reminded me again of going back that morning to the house in which my old man had died; which is funny, because I hadn't thought about it at all since it happened, and even then I didn't worry much about it. I wonder why? I suppose that since I started to think on these long-distance runs, things come into my head and bother my heart and stomach all the time. And now that I see my dad behind each grass-blade, I'm not so sure I like to think and that it's such a good thing after all. But I keep on running anyway – flappity- 10 flap, slop-slop, crunchslap-crunchslap-crunchslap. Only if I take whatever comes like this, in my runner's stride, can I keep on keeping on like my old self; and now I've thought on this far, I know I'll win, in the end. So anyway after a bit I went upstairs one step at a time, 15 not thinking about how I should find dad and what I'd do when I did. But now I'm doing my thinking, going over the troubled life mam gave him as she went with different men even when he was alive. She didn't care whether he knew it or not, but most of the time he 20 wasn't so blind as she thought. So he cursed and roared and threatened to hit her, and I had to stand up to stop him, even though I knew she deserved it. What a life for all of us. Well, I'm not complaining, because if I did complain I might just as well win this bloody race, 25

which I'm not going to do. If I don't lose speed, though, I'll win the race before I know where I am, and then where would I be?

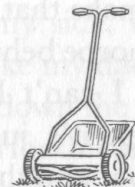
Now I can hear the sportsground noise and music.
5 I've got plenty of breath despite that pain, and I can still give a big last leap if I want to. But everything is under control and I know now that there ain't another long-distance cross-country running runner in England to touch my speed and style. Our bastard of a governor
10 wants me and my running life to give him glory, to put in him blood and life he never had, wants his pals to see him as I *gasp* and *stagger* up to his winning post so's he can say: "My Borstal gets that cup, you see. I win my bet, because it pays to be honest and try to gain the
15 prizes I offer to my lads, and they know it, have known it all along. They'll always be honest now, because I made them so." And his pals will think: "He trains his lads to live all right, after all; he deserves a medal but we'll get him made a Sir" – and at this very moment, as
20 the birds come back to whistling, I can tell myself I'll never care what any of his silly In-laws think or say. They've seen me and they're cheering now, and loudspeakers spreading out the big news that I'm well in the lead, and can't do anything else but stay there.
25 But I'm still thinking of the Out-law death my dad died, telling the doctors to get out of the house when they wanted him to finish up in hospital. He got up in bed to throw them out, and even followed them down the stairs in his shirt though he was no more than skin

gasp, breathe heavily with open mouth
stagger, run or walk with difficulty

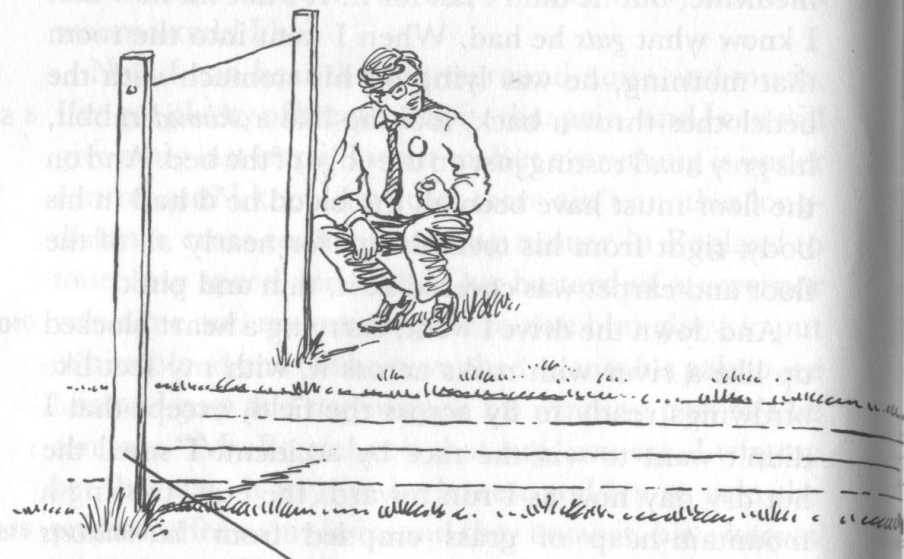
and stick. They tried to tell him he'd want some medicine, but he didn't fall for it. It's not till now that I know what *guts* he had. When I went into the room that morning, he was lying on his stomach with the bedclothes thrown back, looking like a *skinned* rabbit,
5 his grey head resting just on the edge of the bed. And on the floor must have been all the blood he'd had in his body, right from his toenails up, for nearly all of the floor and carpet was covered in it, thin and pink.

And down the drive I went, carrying a heart blocked
10 up like a river with rocks across it, with my feet like birdwings ready to fly across the field, except that I didn't want to win the race by accident. I smell the hot dry day now as I run towards the end, passing a mountain-heap of grass emptied from *lawnmowers*
15 pushed by my pals. I tear off a piece of tree-bark with my fingers and stuff it in my mouth, tasting wood and dust as I run until I'm nearly sick. Yet I swallow what I can of it just the same, because a little birdie whistled to me that I've got to go on living yet but that for six
20 months I'm not going to smell that grass or taste that dusty bark or trot this lovely path. I hate to have to say this, but something made me cry, and crying is a thing I haven't done since I was a kid of two or three. I'm

lawnmower

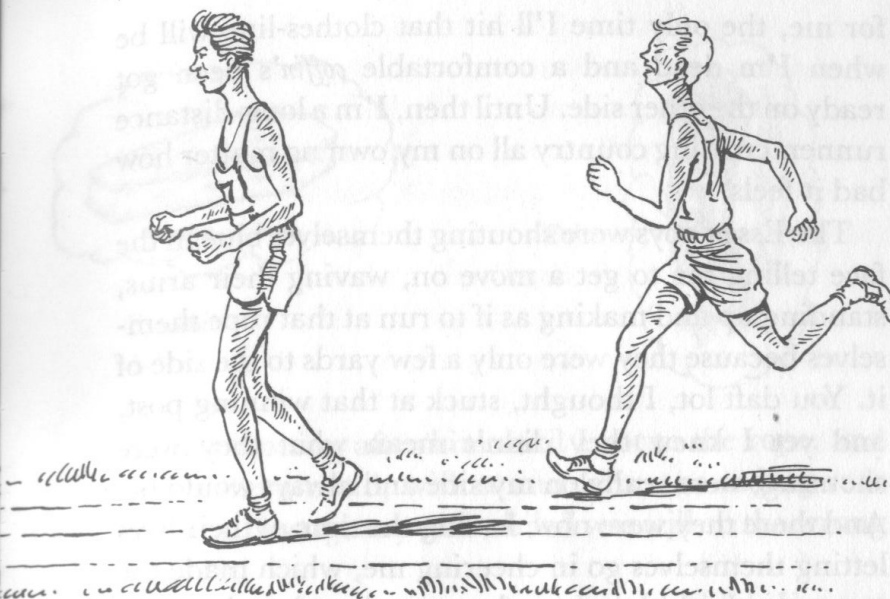


guts, courage
skinned, with the skin taken off



winning post

slowing down now for Gunthorpe to catch me up. And I'm doing it in a place just where the the drive turns into the sportsfield - where they can see what I'm doing, especially the governor and his gang from the
 5 grandstand. I'm going so slow I'm almost at a standstill. Those on the nearest seats haven't understood yet what's happening and are still cheering like mad ready for when I make that mark. And I keep on wondering when Gunthorpe behind me is going to run
 10 into the field because I can't keep this up all day. And I think Oh Christ it's just my bad luck that Gunthorpe's dropped out and that I'll be here for half an hour before the next bloke comes up. But even so, I say, I won't move, I won't go for that last hundred yards
 15 if I have to sit down cross-legged on the grass and have



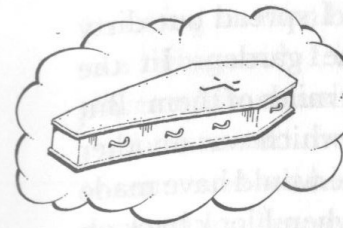
the governor pick me up and carry me there. And that is against their rules so you can bet they'd never do it because they're not clever enough to break the rules - like I would be in their place - even though the rules are their own. No, I'll show him what honesty means if it's
 5 the last thing I do. Of course he'll never understand, because if he and all them like him did understand it'd mean they'd be on my side, which is impossible. By God I'll *stick this out* like my dad stuck out his pain and kicked them doctors down the stairs; if he had guts for
 10 that then I've got guts for this and here I stay waiting for Gunthorpe or Aylesham to go right up against that bit of clothes-line stretched across the winning post. As

stick it out, go on to the end, however hard it is to do so

for me, the only time I'll hit that clothes-line will be when I'm dead and a comfortable *coffin's* been got ready on the other side. Until then, I'm a long-distance runner, crossing country all on my own no matter how
5 bad it feels.

The Essex boys were shouting themselves blue in the face telling me to get a move on, waving their arms, standing up and making as if to run at that rope themselves because they were only a few yards to the side of
10 it. You daft lot, I thought, stuck at that winning post, and yet I knew they didn't mean what they were shouting, were really on my side and always would be. And there they were now, having the time of their lives letting themselves go in cheering me, which made the
15 governor think they were heart and soul on his side, when he wouldn't have thought any such thing if he'd had a bit of sense. And I could hear the lords and ladies now from the grandstand, and could see them standing up to wave me in: "Run!" they were shouting in their
20 high-class voices. "Run!" But I was deaf and blind, and stood where I was, still tasting the bark in my mouth and still crying like a baby, crying now out of gladness that I'd got them beat at last.

Because I heard a roar and saw the Gunthorpe gang
25 throwing their coats up in the air and I felt the pat-pat of feet on the drive behind me getting closer and closer. And suddenly a smell of sweat and a pair of lungs on their last gasp passed me by and went swinging to towards that rope, rocking from side to side, grunting
30 like a *Zulu* that didn't know any better, like the ghost of me at ninety when I'm heading for that coffin. I could have cheered him myself: "Go on, go on, get up to that piece of tape." But he was already there, and so I went



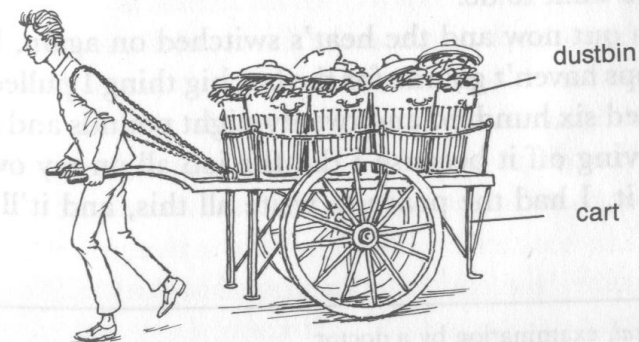
coffin



Zulu

on, trot-trotting after him until I got to the rope, and fell on the ground, with a murderous sounding roar going up through my ears while I was still on the wrong side of it.

It's about time to stop; though don't think I'm not
5 still running, because I am, one way or another. The governor at Borstal proved me right; he didn't respect my honesty at all. Not that I expected him to, or tried to explain it to him, but if he's supposed to be educated then he should have more or less twigged it. He hit back
10 right enough, or thought he did, because he had me *carting dustbins* about every morning from the big full-



working kitchen to the garden bottoms where I had to empty them; and in the afternoon I spread out dirty water over plants growing in the garden. In the evenings I cleaned floors, miles and miles of them. But
5 it wasn't a bad life for six months, which was another thing he could never understand. He would have made it worse if he could. It was worth it when I look back on it, considering all the thinking I did. The boys understood me losing the race on purpose. They never had
10 enough good words to say about me, or curses to throw out (to themselves) at the governor.

The work didn't break me; if anything, it made me stronger in many ways, and the governor knew, when I left, that his spite had got him nowhere. For since
15 leaving Borstal they tried to get me in the army, but I didn't pass the *medical* and I'll tell you why. No sooner was I out, after that final run and six-months hard work, than I went down with *pleurisy*. And that means, as far as I'm concerned, that I lost the governor's race
20 all right, and won my own race twice over. Because I know for certain that if I hadn't raced my race I wouldn't have got this pleurisy, which keeps me out of khaki but doesn't stop me doing the sort of work my fingers want to do.

25 I'm out now and the heat's switched on again, but the cops haven't got me for the last big thing I pulled. I counted six hundred and twenty-eight pounds and am still living off it because I did the job all on my own. After it, I had the peace to write all this, and it'll be

medical, examination by a doctor

pleurisy, disease in which water collects round the lungs

money enough to keep me going until I finish my plans for doing an even bigger job, something I wouldn't tell to a living soul. I worked out my systems and hiding-places while cleaning them Borstal floors.

In the meantime I'm going to give this story to a pal
5 of mine and tell him that if I do get captured again by the coppers he can try and get it put into a book or something. Because I'd like to see the governor's face when he reads it, if he does, which I don't suppose he will; even if he did read it, though, I don't think he'd
10 know what it was all about. And if I don't get caught, the bloke I give this story to will never give me away; he's lived in our street for as long as I can remember, and he's my pal. That I do know.

Questions

Part 1

1. Where is the boy living?
2. Why does he not make a break for it on his long-distance running?
3. At what time of the day does he go out?
4. What are they training him up for?
5. What did the governor say to him the first day?
6. What newspaper does the governor take?
7. What does the boy say about the In-laws who hope to stop him making false moves?
8. How far does he run?
9. What does he think about going into the army?
10. What is the name of the cup in question?
11. Who is it for?
12. Is the boy going to try to get the cup?
13. What will it mean to the governor if the boy wins the race?
14. State two things that the boy says about people having the whip-hand over others.
15. What did the governor do when the boy came back late one morning?
16. What does the boy say about honesty?
17. What would the boy do if he had the whip-hand over the cops?
18. Who, says the boy, will win in the end, and why?
19. What have they shown him by sending him to Borstal? Can you explain what he means?
20. State three things that the boy says about war.
21. Tell the story of what happened at the high-school picnic.
22. What is the most wonderful minute of the boy's

morning run?

23. Have you ever done cross-country running or anything like it? Explain.

Part 2

1. What did the boy's mother do with the money she got after her husband's death?
2. What did the TV advertisements show the family?
3. What kind of fun did the boys have with the TV set?
4. Are there advertisements on TV where you live?
5. Where do Mike and the boy go on the foggy night?
6. What time of year do you suppose it is?
7. What sort of a boy is Mike?
8. How do the two boys get over the wall?
9. What two things do they find in the bakery?
10. Do they take both of them? Explain.
11. What story does the boy think up to explain the moneybox under his jumper?
12. What do you think of his story?
13. What did his father die of?
14. What do they do in the boy's room?
15. How much do you think seventy-eight pounds was worth to the boys?
16. What do they do with the money, and why?
17. Who comes and knocks at the door?
18. Whose side is the boy's mother on? Explain.
19. Is it the first time a detective has been to the house?
20. What questions does he ask the boy?
21. What does the boy think when the man says "We"?
22. What might happen at the Guildhall? What does the boy think about that? What do you think?
23. What do the boys now plan to do with the money?

24. What is the weather like when the man comes for the last time?
25. Why does the boy begin to feel good?
26. What happens then?

Part 3

1. How good a runner is the boy?
2. What does the governor say to him before the race?
3. The boy says he is "going to go down dying with laughter". Why do you think he says that?
4. What tips does he have for us about running?
5. Do you have any tips about running?
6. How does the boy usually run when he gets near the end of the course?
7. What examples does he give of honesty?
8. What does winning mean to him?
9. What does he think about making a break for it?
10. How does he want to hit back at the In-laws?
11. How does his heart feel? Why?
12. How did his father die?
13. What was Out-law about his father's death?
14. Who enters the sportsground first?
15. What speed does the boy run at, and why?
16. What happens just before the winning post?
17. What does the boy do for his last six months in Borstal?
18. What has now happened since he has got out?
19. How long do you think he can live on the money?
20. What two plans does he now have?
21. Now, how about reading this story in the original, as Alan Sillitoe wrote it?